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REMARKS OF SENATOR RUSS FEINGOLD
PRESS CONFERENCE
INTRODUCTION OF SENATE RESOLUTION ON EAST TIMOR
Washington, D.C., May 5, 1999

Thanks, Pat, and thanks to all the members who have taken the time out to be here today to join us in introducing what I think is a very significant piece of legislation. As my friend Sen. Leahy has already explained, the resolution we are introducing today is intended to draw attention to the horrible situation that has once again emerged in East Timor.

This has been forcefully illustrated by a courageous Timorese lawyer, Aniceto Guterres Lopez, in an op-ed in the New York Times today which carefully traces the sources of the current violence in East Timor. This is a piece I hope all of you will read. Now, I have learned, the author's life is being threatened, as has that of Nobel Peace Prize winner Bishop Belo according to today's op-ed.

I am extremely disturbed by this development and believe that these threats must be taken seriously. The Senate will not stand by idly while such threats are made. Those making the threats should know that any such actions will have a devastating impact on Indonesia's relations with the United States and the rest of the world.

The international community, and especially those of us who have been working so hard to encourage a self-determination referendum in East Timor, have a responsibility to do everything we can to make sure the scheduled August 8 vote comes out all right.

Above all, we urge the Indonesian government and military to disarm and disband the anti-independence militias and allow full access to East Timor by international monitors. Make no mistake, the climate in East Timor today, sadly, may have become too violent for a legitimate ballot to take place. The agreement we hope will be announced today in New York will be rendered meaningless if people will fear for their lives if they dare to vote their real choice.

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So even as we celebrate the progress we have made on the diplomatic front, we cannot forget that hundreds of civilians may have been killed, wounded, or may have disappeared in separate militia attacks during the month of April alone.

We cannot forget that violence and human rights abuses in East Timor have increased dramatically since the beginning of this year. We cannot forget that international monitors do not have full access to investigate reports of those abuses. And we cannot forget that the Timorese have been living with violence and oppression for more than 23 years.

These many years have not dulled the desire of the East Timorese for freedom, or quieted their demands to have a role in the determination of East Timor's status.

I personally have tried to do my part to assist them in achieving this goal. Like many of my colleagues, I have stayed with this fight because the people of East Timor have the right to freedom from oppression, the right to express themselves freely, and the right to decide their relationship to Indonesia.

And we're still in this fight because after years of selling arms to Indonesia and supporting Suharto's brutal regime, the United States has a moral obligation to effect change in East Timor. And most of all we have kept this fight alive because as long as anyone is shackled by oppression, our own freedom is diminished.

We have to do all we can to support an environment in East Timor that is conducive to a free election. Now. And throughout the rest of this process.

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